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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000030

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/PASCUAL/RAMCHAND

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TAGS: [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#)
SUBJECT: GAZA CONTACTS DISCUSS DETERIORATING SITUATION AS
IDF STARTS GROUND OPERATIONS

REF: JERUSALEM 00017

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. A wide range of political, civil society, and NGO contacts in the Gaza Strip expressed a growing sense of fear and desperation on January 4, with essential services almost completely cut off and the sounds of intense ground combat growing nearer to densely inhabited areas. ConGen Officers experienced increasing difficulty reaching Gaza contacts by telephone today, reflecting the deterioration of the communications infrastructure. End Summary.

USG PANEL PHYSICIAN:
WATER AND FUEL RUNNING OUT

¶2. (C) Faysal Abu Shahla, chairman of the board of a small medical society and USG panel physician in Gaza City, told PolOff that he is unaware of anyone in Gaza who has had grid electricity since noon on January 3. Information on the IDF ground operation is difficult to obtain, he said, because of a lack of power and interference on TV channels. His family is sheltering in place at home, approximately 100 meters from the bombed-out al-Saraya complex, which he said was struck again on January 3 (Note: al-Saraya was initially damaged in an IAF airstrike on December 28. End Note). Abu Shahla said his family has been without water for 24 hours when their stockpile ran out. His medical society's main hospital, an obstetrics facility, has been taken over by overflow casualties from government hospitals since the airstrikes began. He said the generator will run out of fuel later today and he has been unable to arrange to borrow fuel from UNRWA so far. He said most shops are closed and it is impossible to find bread, even for the hospital. He reported that ambulances are having difficulty coordinating safe passage with the ICRC to reach the wounded. A gas station in the Zaytun neighborhood of Gaza City burned overnight because firefighters were unable to reach it through IDF-Hamas fighting Abu Shahla said.

PALTEL TECHNICAL DIRECTOR:
SEVERE DAMAGE TO PHONE SERVICES

¶3. (C) Telecommunications infrastructure in Gaza has been severely damaged and is hampering communications with the Gaza Strip, according to Mustafa Dib, technical director of PalTel, the main land line provider in Gaza. Dib told EconOff that PalTel, Hadara, and Jawwal mobile services have all suffered "infrastructure damage by missiles, towers hit by rockets, and loss of fuel." Dib said PalTel technical personnel are unable to repair the damage due to the security situation and are fearful for their safety since three PalTel employees were killed while on duty last week.

DEMOCRACY PROGRAM MANAGER:
IDF TOLD US TO EVACUATE AWAY FROM BORDER

¶4. (C) Manal al-Bashiti, the program director of a USAID-funded civil

society/democracy project, told USAID staff that she and her children were forced to leave their home in Khan Yunis after the IDF warned residents near the border to evacuate. She said her husband had stayed in the house so that it could not be taken over by Hamas activists for militant activity. She noted that shelling continues constantly and is growing louder, and she feared that there will be many casualties once the IDF moves into more populated areas. She had heard reports that the IDF advance was bifurcating the Gaza Strip and preventing Palestinian movement.

PA GAZA GOVERNORATE MANAGER:
HEAT AND ELECTRICITY ARE OUT

15. (C) The Gaza Governor's 35-year old office manager, who lives in the "upscale" Gaza City neighborhood of Rimal, told PolOff January 4 that a bomb hit an apartment building a half block from her building on Jan 3, blowing out all of the windows in her apartment. She still does not have any heat or electricity. Helicopters are constantly flying overhead, and the sounds of bombing and shelling are audible from the city's environs. Her four children are frightened and won't venture outside. The streets outside are deserted, she said.

OCHA REP: LESS THAN 10 PER CENT OF
GAZANS HAVE POWER OR RUNNING WATER

16. (C) Gaza's OCHA representative Hamada al-Bayari told EconOff January 4 that less than 10 per cent of Gaza residents have power, and that several power lines from Israel have been damaged in the past few days, reducing the flow of electricity along those lines from 120 MW to 40 MW. Bayari confirmed that the Gaza power plant has been down since

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December 29 due to a lack of fuel. Gaza's current power supply is 52 MW, roughly a quarter of recent supply. Water services have also been cut, according to Bayari, so that less than ten per cent of Gazans have running water as of January 4. Bayari added that as of 1400 local time, he had heard no reports of IDF forces entering Gaza City, but that they had taken over Gaza airport and the areas immediately north and south of Gaza City.

AMERICAN CORNER DIRECTOR:
INTERNATIONAL FORCES ARE "BEST SOLUTION"

17. (C) Dr. Awni Karazon, an Al-Azhar University professor and director of the USG-supported American Corner at al-Azhar University in Gaza City, told PDOff that he has had to rely on the generosity of friends and family since his home was heavily damaged in an IAF airstrike several days ago. He and his family cannot sleep at night due to the intensity of the bombing. He added that it is "life-endangering" to try and go out in the streets looking for food, and that bread queues are now up to six hours long. He remarked that most people have not received salaries for December and have little money with which to buy necessities and food. He said shops are more willing to extend him credit as he is a university professor and is likely to receive back pay in the near future. There is little to no electricity or running water according to Karzon, and medical facilities are seriously overstretched with ambulance teams afraid to travel into the fiercest combat zones in the north and east to collect the casualties. People are fleeing from the north and east, "if they have anywhere to go."

18. (C) Karzon said that a majority of Gazans believe that Hamas' policies are wrong, and that Fatah supporters and independents will not take up arms to make common cause with Hamas militants combating the IDF. He said this neutrality "is not an act of cowardice, but an act of revenge against Hamas." However, even non-Hamas supporters increasingly view the Israeli attacks as indiscriminate and that sympathies could begin to shift with a drawn out land offensive. Given the choice, Karzon said that Gazans would prefer an international presence in Gaza rather than Israeli, Hamas, or Fatah rule. A known Fatah supporter, Karzon said he fears for his safety should the Israeli offensive fail and Hamas militants subsequently seek reprisals against internal foes.

